

# LifePursuits

Winter 2023

## OUR 2022 - 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

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*Lifeworks*

A nonprofit serving  
people with disabilities



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lifeworks.org  
651-454-2732  
contact@lifeworks.org

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**Pictured on cover:**  
Raaj on his father's motorcycle.

**Pictured below:**  
Shinoa at Base Camp in Bloomington.



Dear Lifeworks Community,

When I joined Lifeworks last Spring, the Board of Directors and Executive Leadership Team were in the beginning stages of revising the strategic plan for the organization. With key learnings from my first 90 days as President and CEO, we completed the revision together and created a strong, ambitious, and committed direction for the next three years at Lifeworks.

A bold new vision, mission, and equity statement anchor our 2022 – 2025 Strategic plan. Our vision and mission emphasize accessibility, partnership, and community and are rooted in the concept of change we want to build together. The equity statement, drafted in collaboration with our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Staff Committee, directs how we intend to serve and partner with our community.

Our core work continues, but this plan reinvigorates our language and how we view and approach our work. The four strategic pillars and their corresponding priorities build on our past success in our services while encouraging us to innovate and reimagine what our communities can look like when we partner with people with disabilities.

With our new strategic plan in place, Lifeworks is leaning into our value of “You Lead the Way – We Listen” by partnering with people with disabilities. Instead of offering “one-size-fits-all” services, they tell us what they want, and we ask ourselves how we can make it happen. Often, the answer is to build something brand new. This sets Lifeworks apart in our field and motivates our organization to continue breaking down barriers alongside people with disabilities.

One thing I have always admired about Lifeworks is the organization’s reputation for innovation. We are known for reimagining what our communities can look like when we partner with people with disabilities. And soon, Lifeworks will also be known for our partnerships and co-creation with Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and rural communities – bringing us closer to our vision of accessible, equitable, and diverse communities.

We cannot do this work alone. Your support over time has made Lifeworks a strong and flexible organization. Thank you for continuing to be a part of our community by amplifying the voices of people with disabilities and driving change in the community.

Gertrude Matemba-Mutasa  
President and CEO



# 2022-2025 Strategic Plan

## VISION

Accessible, equitable, and diverse communities.

## MISSION

Lifeworks partners with people with disabilities to drive change by increasing opportunity and access in the community.

## VALUES



### You Lead the Way – We Listen

We honor choice and pursue opportunities with community at the heart of our work.



### Together, We Break Down Barriers

We seek diverse perspectives, advance accessibility, and encourage a sense of belonging for all.



### We Focus on Impact

We hold ourselves to the highest standards. We share expertise and collaborate to find solutions that address the whole picture.



### We Reinvent What’s Possible

We take chances and welcome the unknown.  
We learn from the past and lean into the future.

## EQUITY STATEMENT

Lifeworks strives to be radically accessible, diverse, equitable, and inclusive. We appreciate the vibrancy of differences, center the voices of silenced and marginalized people, and champion universal rights.

## STRATEGIC PILLARS & PRIORITIES

Pilot new initiatives that expand self-determination	Grow core programs and services	Create an employee culture centered on accessibility, diversity, equity, and inclusion	Co-create culturally specific programs with rural communities and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC)
Launch resource navigation	Accelerate growth via geographic expansion of Fiscal Services	Hire a Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility	Identify and build relationships with culturally specific partners
Explore behavioral health therapeutic services	Retain Personal Care Assistance (PCA) customers by converting to Individualized home supports (IHS), Community First Services and Supports (CFSS) budget model, or consultation services	Strengthen recruitment and retention strategies for a diverse workforce	Co-create models that customize Lifeworks’ offerings to rural communities and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC)
Develop disability inclusion products centered around disability rights, self-direction, and employer education	Optimize staff capacity and operations to achieve sustainable growth of employment services	Establish our flexible-hybrid work model	Strengthen relationships with state divisions, departments, and lead agencies to secure resources and impact public policy
Explore sustainable funding models for Apple Valley building	Expand remote services	Streamline user experience for prospective and current employees by implementing a modern Human Resources Information System (HRIS)	





# More Than Just Learning:

## ALYSSA'S STORY

**Pictured above:** Alyssa at Mogwai Collaborative in Mankato.  
**Pictured right:** Alyssa leading an American Sign Language class.

It's a cool, overcast Thursday morning in Mankato. A water main has just broken in the Mogwai Collaborative, a coworking space near the winding Minnesota River and downtown Mankato. The unfortunate timing of this incident lined up with one of the two Thursdays a month when Alyssa, a person accessing employment support through Lifeworks, leads an American Sign Language (ASL) class for a Lifeworks community skill-building group. The class ends early, but not before Alyssa can make a timely pivot in her lesson for the day.

Her first lesson, fittingly, is to teach the group how to sign "pipe broken" in ASL. Together, the group follows her lead. After the class feels

like they have it down, Alyssa continues to guide them through signing different phrases related to emergencies, including "Call 911," "tornado," "car crash," and "ambulance."

**"I'm pretty sure I can make a difference [in] someone's [life]."**

**-Alyssa**

All the while, she weaves in valuable perspectives and essential things to consider when communicating with sign language, such as the generational differences for people who use sign language and the importance of facial expressions.

Alyssa began taking ASL courses at South Central College in Faribault after representatives from the school came to teach residents at the senior living facility where Alyssa worked. Alyssa knew after her conversation with the teachers that she wanted

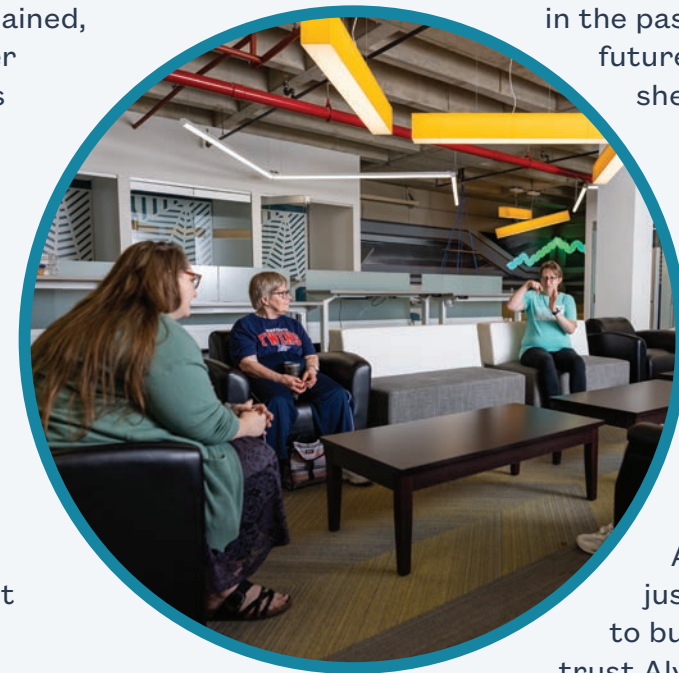
to explore learning the language further saying, "I wanted to help people." Alyssa was driven by the opportunity to change the experience for folks who primarily communicate through sign language. "I can make someone's day, actually," Alyssa says about being able to communicate through sign language. "I'm pretty sure I can make a difference [in] someone's [life]."

Alyssa has used her ASL knowledge to make a difference at her job at Panera Bread. "I had one customer who had her order wrong," Alyssa explained, sharing that the customer was deaf and the cashiers were not equipped to communicate with her to correct their mistake. Alyssa quickly stepped in and signed to the customer, "Need help?" The customer signed back, "Finally, someone understands me." Using her knowledge of sign language and her strong desire to help people, Alyssa was able to correct the order.

Having finished the ASL course, Alyssa is working on becoming a certified ASL interpreter by researching college programs and their requirements. Alyssa is working closely with her Lifeworks service facilitator, Linnea, to navigate options and make a plan that best suits her aspirations. While working toward her goal of becoming an interpreter, Alyssa started teaching ASL to a group of folks supported by Lifeworks in Mankato. Through conversations with staff at Lifeworks, Alyssa discovered teaching ASL would help others learn and would also progress her own knowledge of ASL.

When she began teaching, Alyssa admits, "It was actually kind of exciting. [I was] not as nervous, but mostly excited. I would write ideas

down as I go, make flashcards, and make it like a game." As time passed, the class became more than just teaching folks how to communicate with ASL. Linnea recalls a day when Alyssa's lesson tied together the causes of racial justice and disability justice by connecting how Martin Luther King Jr.'s advocacy to end racial segregation in the United States was similar to pioneers who advocated to end exclusion for people who are deaf. "I like to add a little history, deaf history, about founders who broke the barriers of diversity and what they did in the past, which has really helped future generations," she says.



Linnea recognized the importance of creating space for Alyssa to explore her passion and her ability to forge genuine connections. She says, "Some of my favorite days have been when [I] take a step back and just watch Alyssa's ASL class interact. They just want to learn and want to build community. They just trust Alyssa. I really get to watch Alyssa thrive in a unique way."

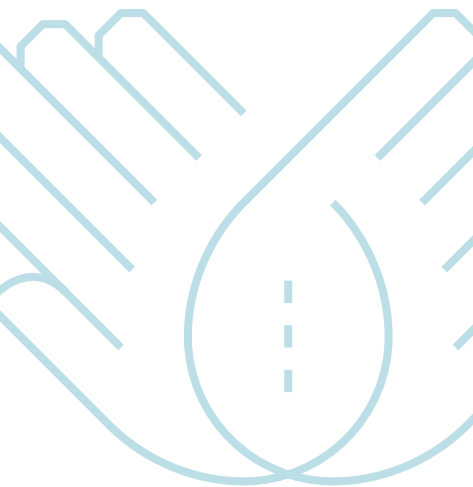
Alyssa continues to lead the ASL class two times a month. One day her classes may end, but her abilities as a teacher and community builder will continue as she works to become an ASL interpreter. For now, she remains excited to teach more classes. "All I can say is as long as they're actually still able to continue learning, it's pretty cool that they want to engage and learn more, instead of [me] being this boring teacher!" she laughs. Above all else, she says, "What is really important to me is that we understand each other." ●





# Focusing on What's Important

RAAJ AND JUSTIN'S STORY



Managing your own support or the support of a family member is complex and often time-consuming. Between overseeing a budget and finding staff to provide care, there are many barriers that can be challenging to navigate. As an approved Financial Management Service provider in Minnesota, Lifeworks brings our experience to our partners navigating programs like the Consumer Support Grant or PCA Choice. Our goal is to ensure our customers have more time to do the things they love.

For Justin and his son Raaj, this means spending more time with family. “Like most families, we celebrate good food and good times. Whether or not we’re meeting as a group or impromptu, food is always involved,” says Justin. When Raaj was in school, he participated in swimming, wrestling, and football. These activities helped Raaj build confidence as he took on new challenges and met other people his age. Justin saw the impact Raaj’s involvement in sports had on him, saying, “I think the camaraderie was more important

**Pictured above:**  
Raaj and his father, Justin.

than I knew. Initially, he was timid to be with the other children because he knew he was different. There were a few swimmers who really challenged him. He wasn’t just along for the ride. He was really racing!”

Now that Raaj is out of school, Justin and Raaj are intentional about keeping community activities a central part of Raaj’s life. Raaj still enjoys swimming, traveling on his own, going to the park, and even joining Justin on his motorcycle. Justin and Raaj are part of a club for people who are passionate about motorcycles and want to have discussions focused on making a change in their communities.

“Whenever I go to the clubhouse, he follows behind me.” Justin and Raaj have more time to be involved in their community and spend time together thanks in part to their partnership with Lifeworks.

Justin and Raaj first connected with Lifeworks nearly a decade ago. “[Raaj] went to a transitional school after high school, and as soon as he got out of there, we got involved with Lifeworks,” says Justin. Their county caseworker recommended Lifeworks to Justin and Raaj as they began to consider what support Raaj would need as

he transitioned into adult life. “[Lifeworks] had the most reputation. The caseworker was very comfortable with them as an organization. I took her suggestion and her lead. I haven’t looked back.”

Justin and Raaj currently access individualized home supports and respite through Lifeworks. They trust Lifeworks to manage the budget

Raaj has received through their waiver. “[Lifeworks] makes it easier for us, because that’s less that I have to worry about,” says Justin. “I get the support I need, no question about it. If I have a concern, I bring it to their attention, and I’ll get it addressed immediately. [They’re] very responsive, and they’ve been a good partner.” ●

**“I get the support I need, no question about it. If I have a concern, I bring it to their attention, and I’ll get it addressed immediately. [They’re] very responsive, and they’ve been a good partner.”**  
**-Justin**



**Pictured right:**  
Raaj has partnered with Lifeworks for nearly a decade.



# Gain the tools to take the next step

Understanding the resources available for people with disabilities can feel overwhelming. You know the life you want to live, but may be unsure of your options, which services can work together, and how to access them.

At Lifeworks, we know that support looks different for everyone – that’s why we take a personalized approach to Resource Navigation. With you leading the way, Lifeworks assists with exploring possibilities and then connects you with the resources that align with your goals.

## Resource Navigation at Lifeworks offers:

- Expert staff trained in person-centered planning and customized employment
- Thorough exploration of your interests, support needs, and future goals
- Regular communication with you and your support team
- Virtual support and digital tools

## Now accepting new participants!

Learn more at [lifeworks.org/day-services](https://lifeworks.org/day-services)



# Help Ensure Our Success in 2023



Message from  
Lori-Anne  
Williams,  
Director of  
Development



**Thank you!** Donors help Lifeworks drive change in our communities. And we are deeply grateful. This past year, our community stepped up like never before. You are amazing!

Your contributions help Lifeworks build innovations and partnerships. As we put our Strategic Plan into practice, we know some of our transformational ideas can’t be funded with the same waiver or other government dollars that fund our services. Your support in 2023 helps Lifeworks:

- Co-create culturally specific programs with Black, Indigenous, and people of color. Your contributions help Lifeworks reach communities that are most often underserved!
- Accelerate our growth by expanding our reach across all of Minnesota. Your contribution ensures people with disabilities in rural communities can access the services they need, regardless of their location.
- Steward more welcoming and inclusive workplaces and communities through disability inclusion training modules. Your contributions help Lifeworks develop outreach and education that could change the way we work together!
- Expand employment offerings to reach younger people with disabilities as they enter the workforce. Your contributions help the next generation of workers find integrated, competitive employment.

## Wondering how to support this work?

Make a donation today at [lifeworks.org/donate](https://lifeworks.org/donate), or send a donation to 6636 Cedar Ave S, Suite 250, Richfield, MN 55423, or email us at [giving@lifeworks.org](mailto:giving@lifeworks.org) for more information.





# Proving Yourself Wrong

## SCOTT'S EMPLOYMENT STORY

**Pictured above:** Scott at Securian's headquarters in Saint Paul.

**Pictured right:** Scott working at his desk at Securian.

When Scott was first hired to work in the mailroom at Securian in 2001, he never imagined he would be taking on the role and responsibilities he has at his job today. "I probably thought I would've only been here a few years. I had never been in a place for a long time," Scott says.

For nearly 19 years, Scott was most comfortable working in a familiar environment, performing the same tasks every day at Securian. "Prior to COVID, I used to deliver mail on a regular basis to different floors. I did that for almost 20 years," he says. "A lot of times, people get kind of comfortable in their own

little niche, and they don't want to do anything different because that's what they've always done."

In October 2020, after several months off of work due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Scott's philosophy shifted, and he decided he was ready to grow in his career. Scott took on a new role as an office service representative at Securian, where he is responsible for referencing agent data in an online database. "Prior to COVID, I probably would not have thought

of me working with [a] computer. No way am I ever gonna do that," he claims. "I had seen [a

computer] before. Everybody else had been doing it for years and went to school for it. I didn't do that."

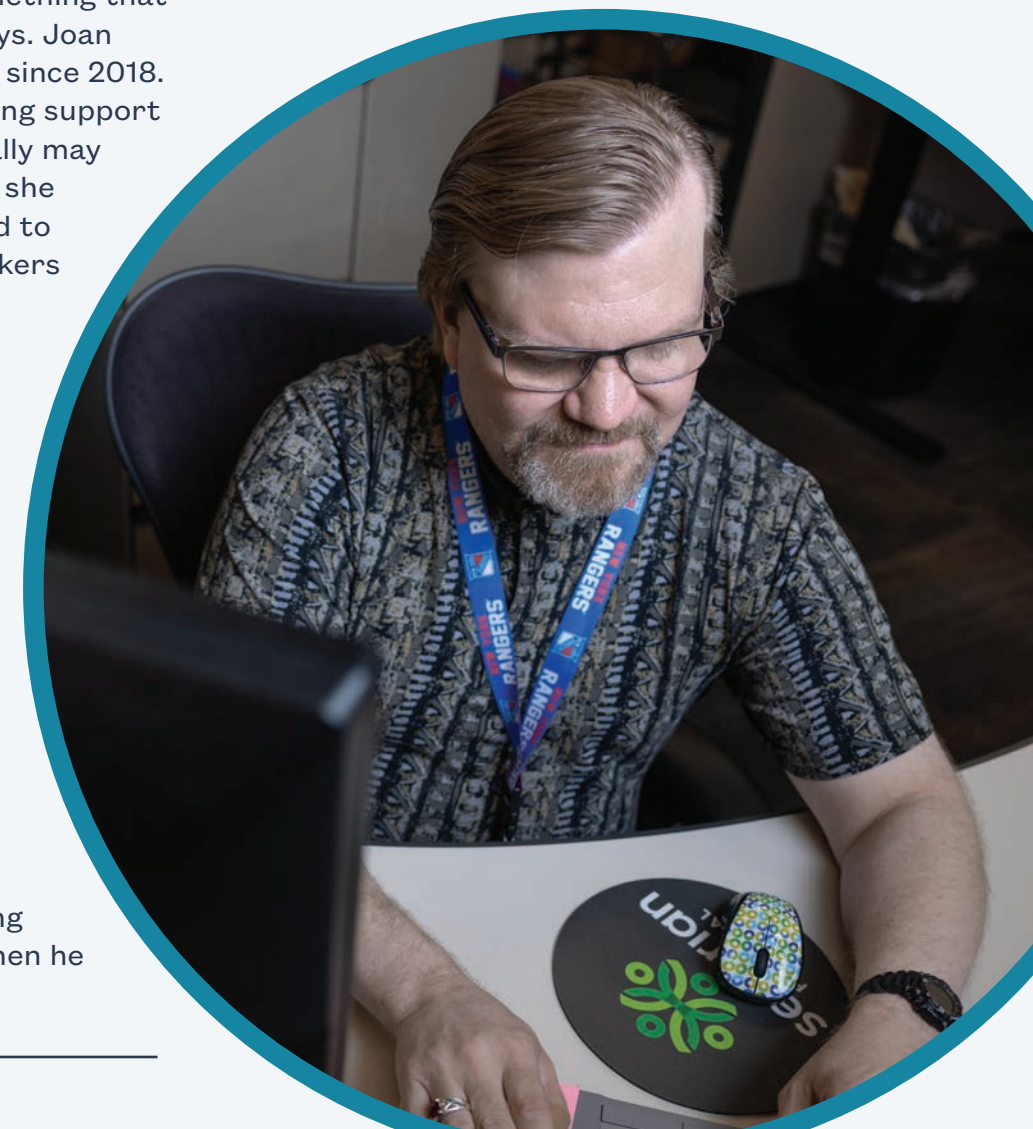
Scott looks back at his previous fear of change and recognizes his achievement in challenging himself to grow. "I'm really proud of myself [that] I was able to do that. It wasn't easy at first," he acknowledges. One reality of change is that you may not get things right the first time. With a blend of personal persistence and a support network to back him up, Scott has excelled in his new role at Securian. "The thing I've learned is don't make the same mistake 85 times. People don't mind you making a mistake. But don't turn around and keep making it over and over."

To ensure he felt successful at his job, Scott leaned on his coworkers and his Lifeworks job coach, Joan, to assist him as he learned new work tasks. "They know it's not something I can learn overnight, or it's not something that can happen immediately," Scott says. Joan has worked with Scott at Securian since 2018. When she saw that Scott was getting support from his coworkers that traditionally may have been provided by a job coach, she started taking a step back. "He had to go to his coworkers, and his coworkers took that piece of training and development, so I've kind of stayed in the background and let that continue," Joan shares. "He took a big leap forward. In my mind, he is embodying everything that we want to happen for a person in employment."

Both Joan and Scott have recognized this as an essential step in Scott's career progression at Securian. "I never thought I'd be doing it myself. But at the same time, it has helped me learn and do things that I didn't think I'd do," notes Scott. He began receiving services from Lifeworks in 2001 when he

started working in the mailroom at Securian. "[Lifeworks] has really helped me out a lot. [They're] all about wanting to help the person they're working with."

There are often barriers in the workplace that prevent someone from thriving, but there are also barriers we, as colleagues, friends, and community members, can unknowingly uphold. We should strive to promote every individual's goals, whether in the workplace or the community and provide space to explore opportunities. In Scott's case, Joan partnered with him to support his goal of advancing in his career at Securian. She understood that she could provide support while encouraging Scott to recognize his capacity to progress at work. "You have to believe you can do it and really make an effort to work hard to do it," Scott says, considering his own agency. He adds a final piece of advice for others who want to make a change: "Never give up hope." ●





# Increasing Access in Our Community



**Pictured above:** Naty and Lori at Base Camp in Bloomington

**Pictured right above:** Noe poses for a selfie at the Como Park Zoo.

**Pictured right below:** Asha at Feed My Starving Children.

Last year, Lifeworks announced we would be leaning on our value of "You Lead the Way – We Listen" by embracing a community-based model for our Day Support program in Brooklyn Park. With the lease of our Brooklyn Park facility ending in March 2023, Lifeworks is moving towards a future where day services are engrained into the community.

Throughout the process, we have centered the lived experiences of the people we partner with to envision what is next. After consulting with our Brooklyn Park clients, we learned that 84% of them love community activities. Listening to those we partner with made our decision not

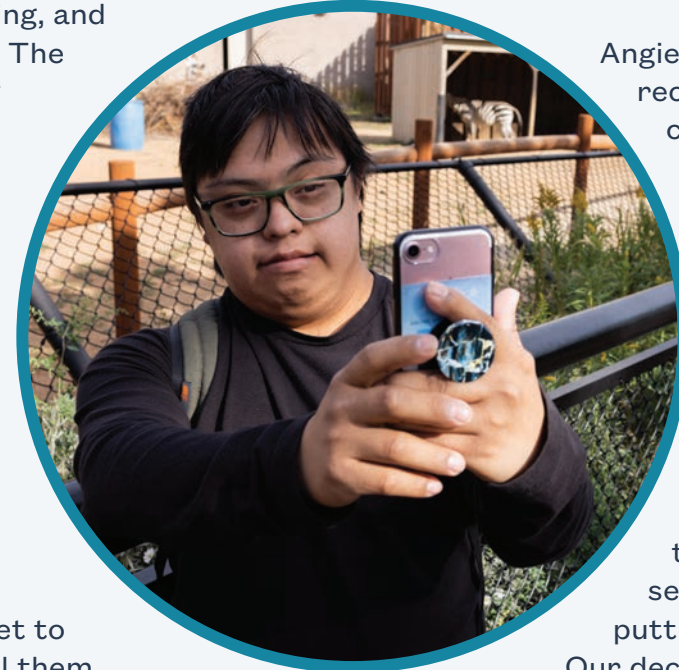
to renew the lease in Brooklyn Park even more evident. By closing one door, we open another to expand our services into new areas. Providing services in the community is not something new to Lifeworks. "We're already doing it," says Angie Baeten, the program manager at Brooklyn Park. "[Some days] I will walk around the building, and there will be nobody here. We are getting out and doing things that people want to do." While the building in Brooklyn Park provides a hub for those in the program, expanding services into the community has allowed Lifeworks to establish partnerships with businesses, other organizations, and community centers.

One such partner is Feed My Starving Children in Coon Rapids. More than 30 Lifeworks clients volunteer at Feed My Starving Children each week, completing tasks such as bag labeling, food packaging, and helping in the warehouse. The staff at Feed My Starving Children are grateful for the impact that the volunteers from Lifeworks have made. Emily, a volunteer program supervisor at Feed My Starving Children, said, "It's fun to see their sense of fulfillment in doing their part to feed kids around the world. It's really cool to have them join us on a regular basis so we can get to know their names and call them friends when they come in."

Eric volunteers at Feed My Starving Children weekly with a group from the Brooklyn Park day program. He says that Feed My Starving Children is one of his favorite places to go out in the community. He feels that volunteering there is important to "help kids from different countries." Eric enjoys sealing the food bags once the other volunteers fill them.

While many folks from Lifeworks volunteer regularly, they also enjoy other activities around the Twin Cities. In September, Lifeworks took trips to the Polaris Fall Day Camp at Fort Snelling and the Como Zoo. Community outings like these provide opportunities for greater community access and inclusion for people with disabilities. As we look ahead to the future

of community-based services, Lifeworks is excited to offer more options for folks to build relationships, learn new skills, and volunteer in our community.



Angie mentioned that she recently received a phone call from someone who met folks from one of the Lifeworks volunteer groups at Feed My Starving Children. "The community is getting to know the people that we're bringing out there, and they're liking their involvement and wanting them out there." This serves as a prime example of putting inclusion into practice.

Our decision to provide services primarily in the community allows people with disabilities to connect with others authentically and experience our communities as full members of them.

At Lifeworks, we envision accessible, equitable, and diverse communities. We know that a crucial aspect of making this vision a reality is the full inclusion of people with disabilities in the places where we work and live. This change can only occur if we continue to increase opportunities for people with disabilities to experience our shared spaces together and by providing broader access in these areas. Our decision to end our lease at the Brooklyn Park facility is an opportunity to fully embrace the path we have been on in partnership with those who come to Lifeworks. ●





# Lifeworks Choirs and Bands Perform Winter Concerts

Last month, the Lifeworks choirs and bands from Apple Valley and Brooklyn Park hosted winter concerts, performing a mix of holiday favorites and familiar hits.

The Songbirds and Musical Syndrome of Apple Valley performed for large crowds at Lifeworks Apple Valley on December 14. The Songbirds choir belted out an impressive 10-song set, including “Santa Claus is Coming to Town” and “No One Else on Earth.” The Musical Syndrome band followed with an afternoon concert, including “Feliz Navidad” and “Country Roads.”

From Lifeworks Brooklyn Park, the Lifeworks Evolution band and Rock Solid Singers 1 and 2 wowed the audience at the Church of the Epiphany in Plymouth on December 16. The Lifeworks Evolution played a 5-song set that included “Blue Suede Shoes” and “Proud Mary.” Rock Solid Singers 1 lived up to their name with a performance of ten songs, including “Hanukkah, Oh Hanukkah” and a “Rockin’ Around the Christmas Tree” duet with the Lifeworks Evolution. Rock Solid Singers 2 closed out the winter concert series with an 11-song performance with hits like “Old Time Rock and Roll” and “Dancing Queen.”

Laura Bronder, Lifeworks Board-Certified Music Therapist, and Addie Heflin, Music Therapy Intern, directed all ensembles.

**Thank you to everyone who attended the concerts in support of these talented musical groups!**

**Interested in donating to support music at Lifeworks?**  
Visit [lifeworks.org/donate](https://lifeworks.org/donate)



**Pictured above:**

1. Dani Hildreth performing with the Songbirds.
2. Rock Solid Singers, Barb Cassady, Asha Shylongteh, Rachel Plaisance, and Naty Holguin.
3. Chrissy Edwards with the Lifeworks Evolution.
4. Rachel Plaisance during a solo with Rock Solid Singers.
5. Addie Heflin warms up with Lifeworks Evolution.
6. Shinoa Makinen-Brown plays guitar.
7. Lisa O'Quinn preparing for a solo.
8. Theo Addo providing the rhythm for Lifeworks Evolution.





**ACCESSIBLE, INCLUSIVE, AND FLEXIBLE**

# A Peek Inside the New Lifeworks Main Office

This fall, Lifeworks moved our main office to a vibrant, centrally located neighborhood in Richfield. Our new office is fully accessible, inclusive, and flexible - embodying our values and putting access front and center. The Lifeworks Main Office is conveniently located on major Metro Transit bus lines and is within the ADA transportation area of the Twin Cities. Our mission, vision, and values inspired the design, creating a welcoming, barrier-free space that emphasizes inclusion. The Lifeworks Main Office supports our hybrid working model that allows our staff to have the flexibility to work remotely, from the office, or other community locations.

We look forward to hosting more gatherings and events at our office with our community in 2023.

**Our new address:**  
**6636 Cedar Ave S, Suite 250, Richfield, MN 55423**

# We're Hiring!

**Partner with people with disabilities to drive change in our community.**

**JOIN OUR DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL TEAM.**

**Lifeworks offers competitive pay and extensive benefits, including:**

- \$1,500 signing bonus
- 18 days of PTO earned your first year and 11 paid holidays
- Medical and dental insurance
- Tuition reimbursement
- 403(b) retirement plan with company contribution and match
- Organizational investment in you through a career progression plan
- Commitment to an accessible, inclusive, and equitable workplace

**READY TO START OR ADVANCE YOUR CAREER?**

For more information and to see our current openings, visit: **[lifeworks.org/careers](https://lifeworks.org/careers)**

**Lifeworks is an equal opportunity employer.**

We are committed to providing culturally responsive services and understand the value of a diverse workforce. Lifeworks strongly encourages women, minorities, individuals with disabilities, and veterans to apply.



**LEARN MORE AND APPLY!**  
**[lifeworks.org/careers](https://lifeworks.org/careers)**







Lifeworks Services Inc.  
6636 Cedar Ave S, Suite 250  
Richfield, MN 55423

**[lifeworks.org](https://lifeworks.org)** | 651-454-2732

For over 55 years, Lifeworks has partnered with people with disabilities to drive change by increasing opportunity and access in the community. Today, we support over 3,300 people with disabilities and their families throughout Minnesota.

Lifeworks is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

This information can be made available in an alternate format upon request.

Lifeworks is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

## SAVE THE DATE

# 2023 ANNUAL CELEBRATION

**Thursday, April 20, 2023**  
The Depot, Minneapolis

Premier Sponsor



Join us for an exciting evening on Thursday, April 20 to celebrate our partnership with people with disabilities as we drive change in our communities.

Registration details coming soon!

Learn more:  
[lifeworkscelebration.org](https://lifeworkscelebration.org)

Can't make it?  
Please consider donating:  
[lifeworks.org/donate](https://lifeworks.org/donate)